



## Network News

### Your Arizona Parent School Connection



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### Look What's New!

by Barb Ross

**Happy New Year!** Please join us in welcoming the new **Enhancing Arizona's Parent Networks (EAPN)** coordinator, Tanya Birecki. She is a former special education teacher and is the mother of three wonderful children. Her youngest son has a condition called Achondroplasia, which is the most common type of dwarfism.

EAPN provides a calendar of events and trainings throughout Arizona that addresses the interests and needs of families and professionals. If you would like more information about EAPN or how to add your non-profit organization to the network please contact Tanya Birecki at [bbirecki@cox.net](mailto:bbirecki@cox.net).



In addition, we would like to announce the new **Procedural Safeguard Notice** that includes contact information for organizations that assist families with understanding the special education process. English and Spanish versions are on the ADE website at [www.azed.gov/ess](http://www.azed.gov/ess). Scroll down to the forms drop down list, then click on the Procedural Safeguard Notice version of your choice, or contact your PIN Specialist.

### Arizona Parent Satisfaction Survey

by Teri Rademacher

Did you know that the State of Arizona has an Individualized Education Program (IEP)? Well, they do! The U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires that states submit their State Performance Plans (SPP) outlining how they plan to address twenty areas surrounding the provision of special education services as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004. The SPP might be considered Arizona's IEP as it includes the state's "present levels", projected targets or "goals", and the activities, programs, and strategies designed to meet those projected targets in all twenty areas.

Did you know that the State of Arizona has to submit progress reports to OSEP annually? Well, they do! Arizona's Annual Performance Report (APR) or "progress report" contains the results of the activities surrounding these twenty areas. One of

the twenty areas requires that Arizona report to OSEP the "percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities."

The Arizona Parent Satisfaction Survey was developed by the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring (NCSEAM) to provide the Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services (ADE/ESS) with information regarding how effectively schools involve parents in the special education process. The *preferred* method of response is by completing the survey online. However, if a family chooses to complete a paper copy of the survey, the school must provide them with an addressed and stamped envelope to ensure its return.

Schools have been provided usernames and passwords that are to be given to families for completing the survey. The username and passwords are not linked to the family or the student, so the survey is completely confidential. The usernames and passwords are required to be used whether the survey is completed online or on paper. Without them, the survey will not be entered into the web-based system. Families need to understand that they will not be provided a new username or password should they lose theirs. Since they are not linked directly to a family or student, it would be impossible to determine if the username and password had already been used, making it difficult to issue new ones without affecting the validity of the survey.

Schools are informed by ADE when it is their turn to conduct the survey. **All** families of children with a disability must be provided the opportunity to participate in the survey. The percentage of families participating in the survey is also important. Results from the survey will be reported to the public.

When completing the survey, families will need to know the primary category of disability under which their child qualifies for special education services. If you are unsure about the category, you may want to ask your child's special education teacher. Families need to answer all 25 questions and complete the general information questions at the beginning of the survey. Information gathered from parents' responses to the survey will be utilized to improve programs for students. By participating in the survey, you have an opportunity to voice your opinions and effect change in your child's special education programming. For more information, contact your PIN Specialist or go online to [www.ade.az.gov/parentsurvey](http://www.ade.az.gov/parentsurvey).

## Increasing Involvement of Parents of Children with Disabilities

by Allison Meritt and Suzanne Roelike

All students, with or without disabilities, benefit from their family's involvement in their education. Students whose parents are more involved in their education miss fewer days of school and are less likely to fail courses than students whose parents are less involved. Research has determined that the earlier this involvement takes place, the greater the benefits for the child and the family (Baily, et al., 1998; Dunst, 2002).

Federal policy, as it pertains to students with disabilities, has long recognized the importance of parental involvement in the schools. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), established procedural safeguards and an important role for parents to ensure that their children had access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The 1997 amendments to IDEA strengthened the parental position, and improved the ways parents, teachers, and administrators make certain the 6.5 million children (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) receive an appropriate education. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Title I, PART A of ESEA defines parent involvement as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities requiring that:

- ❖ Parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;
- ❖ Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;
- ❖ Parents are full partners in the child's education; and
- ❖ Parents are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child.

The Parent Information Network Clearinghouse contains several articles on how parents can improve their participation in and the success of their children's education. One such article is located in the Parent Resources section. The document PR03, *100 Ways to Know More, Do More*. Another article PR13, *How Can I Be Involved*, offers the following suggestions:

- ❖ Visit your child's classroom. A visit will give you an idea of what your child does at school and how he or she interacts with other children.
- ❖ Volunteer to help in the classroom as an assistant (listening to children read, for example, or serving as an aide during computer work).
- ❖ Support student events and performances by helping (such as sewing costumes or painting scenery for a school play) and attending them.
- ❖ If your school has a parents' room/lounge or parent center, drop in to meet other parents and teachers there, or to pick up information and materials.

- ❖ Participate in workshops that are offered, such as those on child development or concerns that parents have (or help plan such workshops). The Parent Information Network has several FREE trainings on a variety of topics including; participation in the IEP, advocacy, and disability awareness.
- ❖ Take advantage of parent-teacher contracts (perhaps agreeing to read with your child for a certain amount of time each night).
- ❖ Ask your child's teacher if he or she has materials that you can use to help your child at home and to supplement homework.

Another great way to become more involved is to serve as a Partners Are Liaisons to Schools (PALS) member. PALS work hand-in-hand with Parent Information Network (PIN) Specialists, at a local level, to increase communication between schools and families, strengthen partnerships, and to provide the ADE/ESS with important feedback on special education issues. If you would like more information on becoming a PALS or available trainings please contact your regional PIN Specialist.

## Calculators: Standard vs. Nonstandard

by Teri Rademacher

Currently the use of a calculator on the Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test is considered a nonstandard accommodation. When students use nonstandard accommodations their tests are scored and they receive their reports but they are not counted as tested. This impacts each school's percentage of students tested and its adequate yearly progress (AYP). For the 2005-2006 school year, approximately one-third of Arizona's schools did not make AYP. Newspaper accounts of why the percentage was so high included the nonstandard accommodations (calculators) that students with disabilities used when taking the test.

The Arizona State Board of Education's (SBOE) agenda for their December 4<sup>th</sup> meeting included the calculator issue and garnered a rather large and passionate response from the public. Following the statements from the public in attendance and a formal presentation by the Arizona Department of Education's Deputy Associate Superintendent of Assessment, Roberta Alley, the SBOE requested that the calculator issue be explored and solutions formulated in time for review at their January meeting. If need be, they agreed to meet at an earlier date to take the necessary action to ensure that schools will not be penalized during the Spring 2007 testing for providing the accommodations required by a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The most moving statement from the public on this issue came from a high school student. She asked the board to not penalize her school for allowing her to use an accommodation that is in her IEP and one that she will continue to use in her adult life – a calculator. To follow this issue, check the SBOE website at [www.ade.state.az.us/stateboard](http://www.ade.state.az.us/stateboard).

## Coping with Stress

by Barb Ross

I love a New Year - out with the old and in with the new. I like the idea of starting fresh. A new beginning for everyone! As parents of children with disabilities we juggle so many different balls it is easy to drop one occasionally. There are so many areas that need our attention; we are constantly prioritizing and reorganizing. Some families have medical issues that need to be addressed. Then there is education, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and habilitation services; usually with different agencies with different criteria that needs to be met. It is easy to get confused and frustrated. In many families both parents work outside the home, so there are demands in that area as well. What it takes to run a home in this century often amazes me. We need to be engineers, accountants, nurse practitioners, and most of all project managers. Meeting the needs of our children whether they have a disability or not is another full time job.

A recent study on parenting stress by Robin Simon with Florida State University and Ranae Evenson with Vanderbilt University found that parents have significantly higher levels of depression than adults who do not have children. (Well that's no surprise; I could have told them that!) Coping with stress needs to be a regularly scheduled part of our lives. Here are a few suggestions:

- ❖ Develop and maintain a supportive network – find people with similar needs and values to share support and encouragement.
- ❖ Develop interests that 'nourish your soul'. We often sign up our children for sports, music or other areas of interests, but we neglect our own need to develop personal interests. Having an outlet can help relieve stress and lift our spirits.
- ❖ It is important for parents to take care of their physical needs. We spend so much time scheduling appointments for our children we forget to do the same for ourselves. Exercise is another great way to relieve stress.

The key to coping with stress is to recognize when you are stressed and actually **DO** something about it. As a parent of eight children, I sometimes get so hyper-focused on dealing with 'critical' issues that I forget to actually spend time developing my relationship with my children. One of my favorite ways to deal with stress is to just stop and play! We take 'therapy breaks' and go to the park or out for a favorite food. I try to spend time with them doing what **THEY** like to do. I watch my son's favorite movie with him even though I have seen it a thousand times.

When they were younger, we would just spend time drawing or coloring; no particular agenda except fun! Dancing to our favorite tunes, blowing bubbles, or chasing each other around the backyard with water balloons were equally fun and reduced stress. We planted a garden. Growing things can be very relaxing and we all know how kids love to dig in the dirt. It didn't have to be a large garden even using an old pot on the patio worked well.

Singing out loud is another great stress reliever and sure to send my family into hysterics. You have never seen anything so funny in your life as me singing along with Andrea Bocelli; ohhh - I don't just sing, I flail my arms around and express myself from deep inside my soul... It's my best tension breaker yet!

When in a difficult situation and feeling overwhelmed, here are a few quick pointers that might help:

- ❖ The old adage, "count to ten" really works! It will give you time to regroup and taking a few deep breaths will actually get more oxygen to the brain; both of which will reduce stress.
- ❖ If possible, go for a walk. Two things are accomplished, you get some needed exercise which in itself is calming and it gives you time to think of alternate ways of dealing with the issue.
- ❖ Use your imagination. Taking a mental hike or sitting on an imaginary beach can sometimes help to restore your peace of mind. Remembering a favorite experience from the past will also help release endorphins.
- ❖ Many parents have found reframing the situation and looking at it from a different perspective is helpful in reducing stress. Sometimes we unintentionally increase our anxiety by going over and over the situation. The more you talk about it the bigger the problem becomes.
- ❖ When you feel the tension building, you can take a break and start relaxing the muscle groups. Start with the toes and work your way up to your neck and head. It only takes a few minutes and can really help you relax and refocus.

There are some effective stress management practices that can be worked into your daily routines. Many of our everyday tasks can be big stress relievers. Turn on some music and clean the house or tackle some clutter. Keep a journal and list everything you are thankful for, work a crossword puzzle, take a nap, or try a new recipe.

We deal with so many serious issues in our lives I think we need to stop and have more fun! Laughter **IS** the best medicine. I love it when my kids tell me they think I'm nuts! And after all, with eight kids who could blame me!

## Mark Your Calendar

### Legislative Awareness Day – February 1, 2007

The theme for this year's event is "No Longer in the Shadows . . . the Groundhog Returns." Once again, the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities is hosting the event at the Arizona Capitol Complex. They have reserved the Senate lawn from 8:00 am – 2:00 pm and will have several opportunities for people with developmental disabilities and their family members to interact with their legislators. Some activities include: individual meetings with legislators, lunch with your legislator, and an exhibit expo featuring information from organizations from around the state that serve people with developmental disabilities.

### More Upcoming Events!

**Tenth Annual Conference on Dyslexia** – “What We Can Do for Adolescent Readers” is the theme for this year’s conference being held on **February 23-24, 2007**. Featured speakers include Rick Lavoie and Dr. Kevin Feldman. Rick Lavoie is best known for his video “How Difficult Can This Be?” “The F.A.T City Workshop.” Dr. Feldman is the Director of Reading and Early Intervention with the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) and is the author of “Kids with Reading Problems in Middle and High School” and “How Older Children Can Improve Their Writing Skills.” The conference is being held at the Black Canyon Conference Center located at 9440 North 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Phoenix. For more information and a copy of the conference brochure, contact Marilyn Willcoxon, at [willcoxon@cox.net](mailto:willcoxon@cox.net).

**Arizona Disability Exposition - February 28, 2007** from 9:00 am-4:00 pm; the EXPO is being held at the Phoenix Civic Plaza, 111 North Third Street, Phoenix. Featured keynote speaker, Mary Jo West, known as the “First Lady of TV News in Phoenix”, will be speaking from 12:00 – 1:00 pm. Activities include exhibits from more than 100 organizations that offer products, services and networking opportunities, recreation and sports, support groups, and advocacy organizations. For further information, please call Susan DeNova at 602-470-1802 x114 or email at [expo@azdx.com](mailto:expo@azdx.com).

### Name or Address Change?

*Network News* goes out to over 4,000 parents, service providers and schools. We need to continuously update our mailing list to stay current. If you have any changes to your name or address, please let us know. We would also like to know if you are a parent, provider, or educator. To update your information, please contact your Regional PIN Specialist below or call 602-542-3852.

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**For more information contact PIN/Child Find Coordinator: Becky Raabe, (928) 679-8106, or [becky.raabe@azed.gov](mailto:becky.raabe@azed.gov).**

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